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SHORT COMMUNICATION

The possible introduction to Madeira of the monarch butterfly, *Danaus plexippus* (L.) (Lepidoptera).—I was interested to read the paper by Salmon & Wakeham-Dawson (1999) on Wollaston and the Madeiran butterfly fauna. This prompted me to ask the authors if they were aware of a suggestion that the Monarch, *Danaus plexippus* (L.) might owe its presence on Madeira to a deliberate introduction some 20–30 years ago. They were unaware of this possibility. The facts surrounding the claim are as follows.

Bill and Margaret Beer were a couple of wildlife enthusiasts who, until the 1980s lived at Marlow Bottom, Bucks. They were members of the (now defunct) Middle-Thames Natural History Society and of the Amateur Entomologists' Society. They bred, amongst other things, Monarch butterflies and as they did not like killing any insects, sightings in the area from around 1960–80 may well have been releases.

On one occasion when I visited them I was interested to see Milkweed (*Asclepias* sp.) growing out of cracks in the paving of the patio and flourishing. It was there, Bill explained, as foodplant for the Monarchs and he went on to say during the conversation that he had introduced them to Madeira. I wondered at the time whether this was a good thing but made no comment; I do not think he would have understood my doubts. Later I passed on this information to Denis Owen, an old school friend, who at that time was particularly interested in the butterflies of the Canaries and Madeira.

To ensure that my memory had not failed me I felt it was necessary to confirm these facts with others and have now done so with more or less positive results. Those consulted were all members of the MTNHS and bear out the facts so far. One of these, Victor Scott, a local naturalist, added that Bill certainly claimed to have introduced the butterflies to Andalusia “about 30 years ago”.

A letter from Ron Youngman can be quoted (in part)—“They were a quite remarkable couple and always had something on the go. . . . I certainly remember them talking about their attempts to introduce Monarchs in various places and I remember them saying they had sown Milkweed seeds in southern Spain and on at least one island. I don't recall that it was Madeira. . . . I can certainly say they attempted their introductions before 1981 and almost certainly in the late 1960's or early 1970's”. This too is my recollection of the date and seems likely, since Martin Albertini has established from old AES membership lists that Bill Beer died between 1983 and 1987.

As there would be no point in attempting an introduction to the Canaries, since the butterfly first appeared there in 1880 (Higgins & Riley, 1970), it is suggested that

Madeira must have been the island involved. The Monarch was certainly present on Madeira in 1984 when I visited and larvae were found in Funchal feeding on *Asclepias curassavica* rather than on native species of this family (Owen & Smith, 1989). Michael Salmon (pers. comm.) comments that Owen, Shreeve & Smith (1987) stated that "These might be the first definite breeding records of the Monarch from Madeira". If so, it is just possible that the Beer introduction was successful. However, the most obvious possibility is that the original butterflies migrated from one or other of the Canary Islands. Owen, Shreeve & Smith (1986) suggest that this was the case, as with *Pararge aegeria* and *Pieris rapae*. The Canaries are also the most likely source of the original stock for an attempted introduction. DNA analysis might show whether the Madeiran butterflies originated from there but even confirmation of this cannot show how they arrived. We will probably never know.

This however, is not quite the end of the story because these investigations led me to contact Dr Peter Edwards. He recorded finding a small colony of *D. plexippus* in Spain in 1984 (Edwards, 1984). Three years later he returned to the same area, near Nerja, which perhaps significantly, is in Andalusia. The butterflies were still there (Edwards, 1988) and with two companions he searched for and found *Asclepias curassavica*. It was "widely distributed . . . but nowhere common" and almost every plant had ova or larvae of *D. plexippus*. However, when he returned in 1991 there were no butterflies or larvae to be found. He recalls too, that he heard a story told of an "eccentric Englishman" who had planted Milkweed and introduced Monarchs, though this could not be verified (pers. comm.).

The parallels in timing of the observations in Madeira and Spain are interesting and certainly in Spain seem to suggest that the butterfly became established over a small area for a short time but failed to consolidate its hold, pointing to a failed introduction either by migration or the hand of man. Perhaps things started in Madeira in the same way but ended differently. Furthermore, in conclusion it is worth pointing out that Professor Joachin Baixeras of the University of Valencia states (pers. com.) that "*D. plexippus* has never been considered as a resident in our (Spanish) fauna".

My thanks are due to Dr Michael Salmon to whom my initial enquiry was made and who has helped in various ways with comments and suggestions since then. Also to all those others mentioned in the text and other members of the old Middle-Thames Natural History Society from whom I sought information.—ALAN SHOWLER, 12 Wedgwood Drive, Hughenden Valley, High Wycombe, Bucks., HP14 4PA

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